

Lead safe housekeeping

Lead and your health

Because lead is cheap and useful, it is found in many products and in many places in the environment.

Lead can affect anybody, but children under the age of four and pregnant women are most at risk. Lead can affect children by causing learning and attention problems, hearing loss, slowed growth and behaviour problems.

Lead can affect adults too. Low levels of exposure can cause joint and muscle pain, high blood pressure and infertility. Higher levels can cause memory loss, nerve problems and, at very high levels, fits.

Lead gets into our bodies when we breathe in lead dust or fumes in air, or if we eat food or drink water that contains lead. Children can rapidly pick up lead through normal hand-to-mouth activity. Small amounts can gradually build up in the body and cause health problems.

The following housekeeping tips will help reduce your and your family's exposure to lead.

Mopping and wet-wiping

Use wet-wiping and mopping (not dusting and sweeping) which stops dust lifting into the air where it can settle back onto surfaces.

Wet-mop hard floor surfaces and entrances and wet-wipe benchtops, furniture, toys, window sills and kitchens (especially surfaces accessible to children). Use high-phosphate detergents (for example, liquid sugar soap) which quickly remove lead particles. Wear gloves as these detergents are harsh. Rinse the mop and change the water regularly.

The frequency of cleaning depends on the level of lead contamination. In older homes, or near major traffic arteries or factories, mop and wipe at least once a week.

When vacuuming, wait more than an hour for dust particles to settle (preferably with doors closed to minimise air flow and dust disturbance) before wet-mopping and wet-wiping. Overnight is even better.

Vacuuming

Ordinary vacuum cleaners cannot filter all fine lead particles. If carpets are likely to contain lead dust from previous renovations, use a vacuum cleaner with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter, or use a ducted vacuum system. If these are not available, try to vacuum when young children are not present, and allow time for dust to settle before they come back into the room. Vacuum once a week to minimise dust disturbance.

Carpets

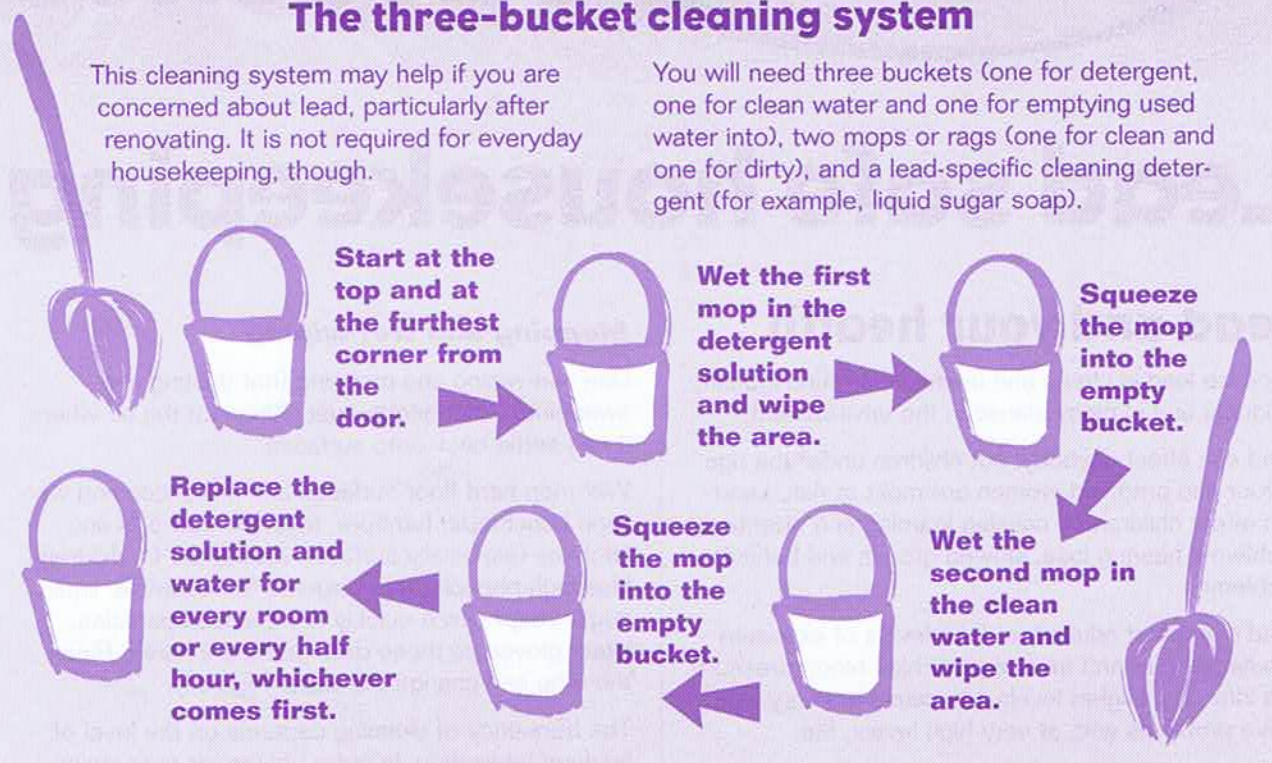
Remove old carpets if possible, as they are much harder to clean



The three-bucket cleaning system

This cleaning system may help if you are concerned about lead, particularly after renovating. It is not required for everyday housekeeping, though.

You will need three buckets (one for detergent, one for clean water and one for emptying used water into), two mops or rags (one for clean and one for dirty), and a lead-specific cleaning detergent (for example, liquid sugar soap).



than smooth surfaces. Carpets may need to be thrown out if contaminated by renovations. If removing carpets, wet them first and roll them inwards to reduce the spread of dust. Cover them in plastic. Wet-mop the area after the carpet is removed.

Pets

Animal coats may harbour considerable amounts of dust. Brush pets outside and ensure that children wash their hands after patting them. Use liquid sugar soap to wash any animal bedding that may be accessible to children.

Laundry

Regularly wash children's toys, dummies and blankets in liquid sugar soap and rinse well. Do not shake or leave dusty clothes near children. Wash lead contaminated work clothes separately from family clothes, and use a phosphate detergent. Rinse the machine to prevent contaminating other clothes.

Lead-related occupations and hobbies

Lead is used in construction and demolition industries, panel beating, motor repair trades, mining, smelting and others. Workers in these occupations can bring lead home on their clothes and contaminate their house. Wash work clothes at work if possible.

Hobbies using lead include shooting, lead-lighting and boat, car and furniture restoration. Keep children away from lead-related work or hobby areas. Don't store work or hobby-related materials in areas

accessible to children. Clean areas thoroughly to minimise exposure.

General

Regular hand-washing can make a huge difference to a child's intake of lead dust. Always wash hands with soap after outside play and touching pets, and before eating. Dry them well, as damp hands will pick up more dust. Keep fingernails short and use a nail-brush regularly. Keep dummies clean and keep them out of the dirt by pinning them to clothing (be careful of choking hazards!). Give young children frequent meals and snacks – up to six a day – as they absorb less lead with food in their stomach. Make sure they eat enough iron, protein, calcium, vitamin C and zinc, and avoid fatty foods.

How to get advice

For information on lead and the environment call the NSW EPA's Pollution Line on **131 555**.

For further information and advice about protecting yourself from lead, about qualified paint inspection and removal services, and guidelines for safe home renovation, call the Lead Advisory Service on:

1800 626 086 or (02) 9716 0132.

Ask your doctor if you want to know more about blood tests or the effects of lead on health.

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